

CHAPTER 4: A GLIMPSE INTO TEACHING IDIOMS IN THE SECONDARY EFL CLASSROOMS IN TURKISH SCHOOLS

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1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact that there is a high demand for the English language worldwide due to its dominance in international trade, business, technology and science (Ababneh & Al-Momani, 2011). Various studies have been carried out in many areas of English language and education in today's increasingly globalized world, but figurative language items such as idioms have often been at the bottom of the priority lists. However, this does not mean that the necessity and importance of idioms in everyday communication should not be emphasized (Hussein et al., 2000). On the contrary, many researchers consider idioms to be an important area of linguistics, and the ability to recognize and use idioms is an indicator of students' sophistication in English (Alhaysony, 2017).

In recent years, vocabulary teaching has witnessed a significant shift from teaching isolated words to focusing on language chunks. These chunks include phrases such as idioms, proverbs, and collocations, collectively referred to as formulaic sequences, multi-word units, or prefabricated units. Formulaic sequences are ubiquitous in language use and make up a large portion of any discourse (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). They are an essential element of language that contributes to fluency (Nation & Meara, 2002) and are regarded as a key feature of natural and figurative language (Irujo, 1986).

Idioms are defined by Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) as “complex bits of frozen syntax, whose meanings cannot be derived from the meaning of their constituents, that is, whose meanings are more than simply the sum of their individual parts” (p. 33). This characteristic makes idioms a significant challenge for many second/foreign language learners (Cooper, 1998; Irujo, 1986; Lattey, 1986; Moon, 1998; Sparado, 2013). Glucksberg (2001) emphasizes that mastering idioms is both an important and difficult task for language learners.

Despite the recognized importance of idioms in language learning, idiom teaching is an area that is often overlooked in vocabulary instruction. Lazar (1996) argues that the vital importance of idioms in vocabulary teaching should be taken into consideration. This oversight in idiom

instruction is particularly noteworthy in the context of EFL classrooms, where learners have limited exposure to authentic language use outside the classroom.

In Turkish secondary schools, where English is taught as a foreign language, the state of idiom teaching remains largely unexplored. This chapter aims to examine how idioms are incorporated (or not) into EFL instruction in these settings, focusing on teachers' perspectives, challenges, and practices. By investigating this aspect of language teaching, we hope to shed light on potential areas for improvement in EFL curricula and pedagogy in Turkish secondary education, ultimately contributing to more effective and comprehensive language instruction.

2. Key concepts and issues around teaching idioms

2.1. Conceptualizations of idioms

Before examining the use of idioms in English language teaching, it is important to understand what idioms are and what they are not. Over time, various fields have been identified for idioms and researchers have come up with different definitions. If we examine the definitions of idioms in various dictionaries, TDK Büyük Sözlük (2005) defines idioms as “A stereotyped expression that usually carries an interesting meaning that is more or less separate from its true meaning.” The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2006, p. 805) defines idioms as “A group of words that has a special meaning different from the literal meaning of the words that compose it”. Similarly, the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines it as “A group of words whose meanings cannot be inferred from their individual words when used together”. In addition to the dictionary definitions, cognitive science has analyzed idioms from a different perspective independent of language. From a cognitive perspective, idioms are products of conceptualization that shape an individual's thought system (Dobrovol'skij & Piirinen, 2005; Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses & Szabo, 1996; Lakoff, 1980).

On the other hand, many linguists and cultural scientists have provided definitions that take into account the linguistic, structural, semantic, cultural and irregular characteristics of idioms. Structurally and semantically, according to Khan and Daşkın (2014), idioms are figurative, indirect and multi-word expressions. Linguistically and semantically, Joelene and Maureen (2003) argue that idioms are expressions whose meaning is not directly interpreted and whose figurative interpretation cannot be inferred directly from the meaning of the word. From a linguistic, semantic and structural point of view, according to Aksan (2003), idioms are words formed by using two or more words together to express a certain concept, emotion or situation. Culturally, semantically and structurally, according to Akkök (2007), idioms are linguistic units

based on cultural conventions, formed by the combination of words, whose meaning cannot be deduced from their components, and which have syntactic and semantic limitations that cannot be analyzed.

In terms of culture and irregularity, according to Caro (2009), idioms are forms of expression that are unique to a language or dialect and usually do not follow any rules of logic or grammar. Considering the definitions of idioms over time, it is possible to say that idioms are versatile, diverse and unique linguistic elements. The definition that will be used in this study is the most recent one by Caro (2009) because it is important for beginning learners of English idioms to learn that idioms are unique to the English language and should be treated independently of any logic or grammatical framework.

2.2. Classification of idioms

There are different views and distinctions in the classification of idioms, which have been tackled by various fields and disciplines over time. Cain (2005) divides idioms into two as transparent idioms and non-transparent idioms. Transparent idioms are figurative expressions whose meaning is more easily understood than non-transparent idioms (Boers & Demecheleer, 2001). Transparency refers to the degree of conformity between the literal and figurative meaning of an idiom (Cain, 2005). In other words, transparent idioms are idioms that are closer to the literal meaning than the figurative meaning, both as a whole and in terms of the language units they contain. For this reason, transparent idioms are easily understood only by the words in them (Elkılıç, 2008). However, the situation is different when an idiom contains cultural elements beyond the meaning of the words. When an idiom is specific to a culture, the fact that it is transparent does not make it easier to extract its meaning (Elkılıç, 2008). Non-transparent idioms are expressions that contain words that do not help to extract the meaning of the idiom (Elkılıç, 2008). In non-transparent idioms, the literal and figurative meanings of the idiom are completely independent of each other (Elkılıç, 2008).

Another classification was made by Irujo (1986) who categorized idioms into three categories: same, similar and different idioms. The same idioms are expressions that have exact equivalents between two languages; similar idioms are expressions that do not have exact equivalents between two languages but are similar in meaning and/or structure; different idioms are expressions that are found in only one of the two languages and have no equivalent in the other language due to cultural and/or linguistic differences.

2.3. Functions of idioms

A common feature in all types and classifications of idioms is that idioms are linguistic units. In addition, like all linguistic units, they have many functions in spoken and written language. Idioms are used to convey and evaluate thoughts, information and opinions (ideational function), to promote and maintain meaningful and effective communication and to create a sense of solidarity (interpersonal functions), and to organize information and maintain text coherence (textual function) (Carter & McCarthy 1997; Liu, 2008; Nunberg et al., 1994; Souha 2008; O’Keffee et al., 2007). In addition to these functions, Newmark (1988) argues that idioms have two basic functions: referential and pragmatic functions. The referential function is a cognitive function that describes mental processes, situations, concepts, people, objects, structures or actions in a more comprehensive and concise way than is possible in literary or physical language. The pragmatic function is the aesthetic function, which simultaneously appeals to the senses, such as interest, happiness, joy, surprise. Idioms also have an impact on the naturalness and formality of language when they are used. Idioms add color, naturalness and expressive power to people’s language, so that a concept or situation can be explained in a shorter time and the expression becomes more attractive (İli, 2015). The English language is rich in idioms, without which English would lose much of the variety and humor of its spoken and written language (Caro, 2009). Thanks to idioms, English can be expressed in a friendly, informal, relaxed, engaging and creative way (Caro, 2009).

2.4. Structural characteristics of idioms

Each language unit has structural features as well as functions, and idioms also have their own structural features. According to Liu (2008), three main features stand out in the structure of idioms. These are:

- a) The meaning of idioms cannot be fully deduced from the units contained in them.
- b) Idioms have a fixed structure.
- c) Idioms are made up of two or more words, and this is no different with compound words.

Some researchers have drawn attention to semantic and figurative features that are not emphasized in these three basic features. According to Hussein et al. (2000), the meaning of an idiom is not the sum of the meanings of its constituent words or the meanings of its parts. In

fact, even if there is a relationship between the meaning of the constituent words and the whole idiom, this relationship is indirect at best (Sprenger et al., 2006). In other words, the meaning of idioms is arbitrary and therefore unpredictable (Chen & Lai, 2013). Jackson (1988) stated that the meaning of idioms is arbitrary because idioms are based on metaphors. Considering that the meaning of an expression is related to language, there are some who argue that idioms are not linguistic. According to Akkök (2007), idioms have a conceptual nature, not a linguistic nature, and the fact that they correspond to certain concepts, express these concepts and activate these concepts in our minds shows that idioms are closer to conceptual nature.

2.5. Difficulties in understanding and learning idioms

The structural features of idioms also pose various challenges for their comprehension and learning. It has long been recognized that idioms pose a problem for second language learners because their meanings and forms are not rule-bound (Chen & Lai, 2013). While learning and understanding idioms is considered difficult even for native speakers, it is much more difficult for target language learners with limited language skills and cultural background (Gibbs, 1994). Many advanced learners of the target language still struggle with idioms even after they have mastered many other aspects of the language system (O’Keeffe et al., 2007). McPartland (1981) believes that the main reason why idioms are difficult to learn is that they are figurative expressions that do not correspond to literal meanings and do not literally express the words in which they occur. Similarly, Saleh and Zakaria (2013) consider the fact that the meaning of idioms is often unpredictable as one of the main challenges of idiom learning. Especially for EFL learners, the unpredictability of idioms can be problematic (Rizq, 2015), and memorizing idioms without logical relationships or systems can be time-consuming and tedious (Chen & Lai, 2013). In addition to being time-consuming to memorize, idioms take longer to understand than texts that need to be understood verbatim (Holsinger & Kaiser, 2013). Irujo (1986) argued that there are three main difficulties in learning idioms. These are:

- a) In conversations with second language learners, idioms are often omitted and replaced by simple, concrete and everyday expressions and words.
- b) Idioms differ from slang in being formal, with connotations that can be used in formal situations.
- c) In many materials for second language learners, idioms are completely ignored or placed in the “Other Phrases” section of vocabulary lists and no learning exercises are provided for them.

Avoiding the use of idioms in conversations with students, omitting idioms from the materials presented to students in class, and the absence of learning exercises all lead to a significant reduction in students' exposure to idioms. Thus, for learners who rarely hear idioms, idioms can hinder their understanding of English and demotivate them (McDevitt, 1993). Moreover, communication errors can occur if learners are not familiar with idioms (Rizq, 2015). Pimenova (2011) elaborated on students' unfamiliarity with idioms and categorized the difficulty of learning idioms into five main categories: unfamiliar vocabulary and foreign idioms, lack of similar idioms in the native language, cultural differences, lack of experience with idioms, and lack of general context for specific idioms. Rizq (2015) further elaborated on the difficulty of cultural differences in learning idioms in his study. According to Rizq (2015), idioms are difficult to understand and use because they are deeply rooted in the culture of the language, and so when the relationship of idioms to culture is combined with the way idioms are taught, this combination is often not a combination that makes it easy for learners to understand and use idioms. In addition, cultural similarities and differences between the first language and the target language can make the transfer of idioms between languages difficult (Chen & Lai, 2013).

In addition, it is quite possible to see pieces of culture in idioms. Idioms reflect the traditions, cultural values, characteristics, social attitudes and norms of a society (Çakır, 2011). Moreover, national archetypes, symbols, myths, religious beliefs, worldviews and cultural values are reflected in idioms (Dohman & Yüce, 2022). Thus, idioms become a mirror of culture that enables the understanding of culture through language (Jiang, 2000). However, idioms not only reflect culture, but also play a role in transmitting culture to future generations. Idioms, which are seen as language units, are considered as cultural carriers and in this respect, idioms reflect the accumulation of national language, culture and human history and are used to express worldviews, linguistic worldviews, national worldviews, historical, social and cultural situations, material and spiritual situations and provide information about people's cultural life (Dohman & Yüce, 2022). The more knowledge students have about the cultural elements behind idioms, the more cultural awareness they have about the characteristics of different cultures will increase.

2.6. The relationship between teaching idioms and culture

Culture is not only a factor that complicates idioms; it is also the only factor that allows idioms to take shape over time. Idioms have been shaped according to experiences, lived experiences, ways of thinking and the laws that have been formed in the language over time

since the existence of human beings, and for this reason, idioms have gained a meaning independent of the actual meanings of the words that make up them (İli, 2015). In other words, idioms reflect the culture in which they are produced and are shaped according to the characteristics of the culture to which they belong (Dohman & Yüce, 2022). This shaping process is sometimes not through a single culture. According to Chen (2009), idioms are rooted in different cultures. This means that it is quite possible to find idioms unique to a single culture and similar idioms in different cultures.

2.7. The prevalence of idioms

Given that every culture has idioms and that there are countless cultures, idioms are widespread and are an important part of any language, as well as an indicator of proficiency in that language (McDevitt, 1993). Idioms are so widespread that a person uses about 20 million idioms in a 60-year lifetime (Cooper, 1998) and idioms are used to explain about 50% of language (Erman & Warren, 2000). Idioms frequently appear in both written and spoken language, explaining about half of the language (Alhaysony, 2017). Since examples of written and spoken language in which idioms are frequently used include all kinds of discourse such as conversations, lectures, books and newspapers, students are especially likely to encounter idioms in movies and television series (Cooper, 1999). According to Wright (2002), this probability is so high that it is impossible to speak, read or listen to English without encountering idiomatic language and it is not possible to postpone idiomatic expression learning until advanced levels are reached. The need to teach idioms in English language teaching stems from the high rate of their use in daily communication (Bortfeld, 1997). Because of this inevitability of idioms and the fact that they are encountered by students both in and out of the classroom, they need to be treated and addressed in some way in the classroom (Rizq, 2015).

2.8. The prerequisites for understanding idioms

Although idioms are frequently encountered items, their comprehension is not so common. The main reason for this difference is that idioms have various prerequisites for comprehension. Palmer and Brooks (2004) argue that the process of interpreting figurative language is related to the prior knowledge that learners use to interpret the expressions they encounter in context. The most important of these priors is cultural priors because understanding many idioms requires cultural knowledge (Liu, 2008). In addition, understanding idioms requires students to go beyond word-by-word interpretation and assimilate figurative meanings (Alhaysony, 2017). The closer the figurative meaning of the idiom is to the dictionary meaning of the words that make up the idiom, the higher the comprehension rate of idioms is

(Levorato & Cacciari, 1999; Nippold & Taylor, 2002). Another factor that increases the comprehension rate of idioms is context. Idioms presented in context are easier to understand than idioms presented in isolation (Cain, 2005). Context facilitates the understanding of figurative expressions by providing semantic information that enables the reader or writer to understand the form of expression (Cain, 2005).

2.9. Teaching idioms in the classroom

The extent to which idioms are comprehensible both outside and inside the classroom is the main determinant of why and how idioms are included in English language teaching. When idioms are decided to be taught in English classrooms, they are randomly selected from a list of idioms created by teachers (Hussein et al., 2000). However, idioms often do not receive much attention in English language teaching because teachers try to simplify the English used in the classroom for students and emphasize grammar rules (Asl, 2013; Wray, 2000). Although idioms are not given as much emphasis as other elements taught in the English language classroom, theories and methods have emerged over time to suggest why and how idioms should be taught. Idioms teaching methods fall into two categories: the traditional method, which encourages explicit teaching of idioms in context, and the conceptual metaphor method, which starts teaching English idioms after learning a little about terminology.

Traditional idiom teaching is based on memorization and repetition (Chen & Lai, 2013). However, unlike many traditional language teaching methods, the traditional method performs memorization and repetition activities by presenting idioms in a context. This method supports that through contextual exercises and analysis of figurative expressions, students will broaden their horizons, understand and learn unfamiliar idioms (Adkins, 1968). The traditional method bases this belief on the idea that contexts effectively facilitate the understanding, learning and teaching of idiomatic expressions (Liontas, 2003) because the more contexts surrounding an idiom, the more likely the target language learner is to arrive at its correct meaning (Kainulainen, 2006). However, as with any teaching method, the traditional method has its criticisms and shortcomings. In particular, the memorization technique applied in the traditional method can lead to short-term recall of the learned information and misuse of the remembered information (Chen & Lai, 2013). At the same time, the rigorous learning process of traditional idiom teaching methods can be difficult in terms of time and effort because students learn idioms independently without establishing a relationship between form and meaning (Chen & Lai, 2013). The idea of using conceptual metaphors in teaching idioms in response to the traditional method's inability to establish a relationship between form and meaning aims to

improve the understanding of the meaning of the idiom and the recall of learned expressions over time by promoting awareness of the systematic relationship between the two concepts (Boers, 2000; Kömür & Çimen 2009). With the advances in cognitive linguistics research, idiom teaching methods have moved towards an approach in which students become aware of the conceptual metaphors underlying idioms (the primary motivation of idioms) (Chen & Lai, 2013).

Conceptual metaphor theory was coined by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980. The conceptual metaphor expression refers to the connection between two semantic domains within or outside the idiom at the level of thought (Lakoff, 1987). In other words, many idioms contain concepts that are semantically related to each other and subject to analogy. Conceptual metaphors can contribute to the understanding of idioms because many idioms are based on conceptual metaphor systems (Samani & Hashemian, 2012). One of the major contributions of teaching conceptual metaphors to understand idioms is that it enables language learners to express their inner thoughts, opinions, ideas and feelings in a similar way to native speakers (Çakır, 2011).

In order to understand the semantic relations in idioms, second language teachers and their students should give importance to conceptual metaphors of idioms in the target language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). To discuss theories other than methods in teaching idioms, Asl (2013) discusses idiom teaching in the context of schema theory. According to this theory, longer contexts such as stories have been found to activate many schemas, while shorter contexts activate fewer schemas. It is argued that involving multiple schemas in contextual processing can help in learning and remembering the meaning of idioms.

If we examine the effect of culture in teaching idioms, idioms containing cultural elements should be taught by comparing the native and target languages (Elkılıç, 2008). Through cross-linguistic comparisons, students can be informed that the items found in the native language may not always be present in the target language (Chen & Lai, 2013). For this reason, idioms that involve possible interactions and relationships in the culture of both native and target languages should be prioritized (Elkılıç, 2008). To overcome the cultural barriers that arise when idioms in the first language do not have equivalents in the target language and vice versa, comparisons between the first language and the target language can be explicit and direct through awareness-raising (Chen & Lai, 2013). In cases where comparisons between native and target languages may be difficult or impossible, idioms should be taught according to their degree of prevalence, with the most common idioms first (Elkılıç, 2008). When teaching

common idioms, these idioms should be taught both in the text (context) and in isolation (Elkılıç, 2008). However, it is not enough just to teach idioms, they should also be practiced and constructed by students (Çakır, 2011). In order to increase the amount of students' application and construction of idioms, teachers should increase their own use of idioms in the classroom and be a model for students (Çakır, 2011). In addition to increasing their own use of idioms, teachers should facilitate this process by teaching students the strategies most frequently used in idiom teaching, such as inferring meaning from context, analyzing and discussing, and using word meaning (Cooper, 1999).

The factor that most facilitates the process of teaching idioms is understanding why idioms are taught, or in other words, why idioms are important. If one of the advanced objectives of English language instruction is to elevate students to a level closest to native English speakers in terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, then the knowledge of various idiomatic expressions and the ability to use these expressions appropriately in both written and spoken language is a distinctive feature necessary for using English in a manner similar to a native language (Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs, 2006). In other words, knowledge and use of idiomatic expressions are characteristic features of advanced EFL students (Hussein et al., 2000) and are essential for successful communication in listening, writing, reading, and speaking (Dixon, 1994). Through knowledge of idiomatic expressions, students speak more proficiently, and their speech becomes more natural, colloquial, and creative (Beloussova, 2015; Caro, 2009). The ability to interpret and use cultural references and figurative expressions is so crucial that these are integral components and indicators of communicative competence requirements (Bachman, 1990; Ellis, 1997). Learning idioms not only contributes to language learners' enhanced communication but also aids in their acquisition of knowledge about the culture and society of the target language (Samani & Hashemian, 2012). Idiom learning enables students to engage with the real world (Caro, 2009), and to understand a language in the real world, it is necessary to comprehend its idioms (Chen, 2009). For these reasons, it is important to teach idioms in English classes and to incorporate them into teaching materials and textbooks (Khan & Daşkın, 2014).

Another reason for the importance of idioms in language teaching stems from the deficiencies that may arise when idioms are not taught. Neglecting the instruction of English idioms leads to misunderstanding and misuse of idioms by intermediate and advanced EFL students (Hussein et al., 2000) and has a negative impact on students' overall performance (Caro, 2009). Behind the overlooked idioms lie moral values, concepts, and stories (Rizq, 2015), and the lack of this

background knowledge results in students' speech becoming bookish, insipid, unimaginative, artificial, and devoid of innovation (Cooper, 1999).

3. The state of idiom teaching in classes

The sample of the study conducted in the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year consists of a total of 10 English teachers working in secondary schools in the province of Burdur, as well as Bucak, Gökçebağ, and Askeriye regions. The ages, genders, professional experiences, and schools of the teachers in the sample group are shown in Table 1. The rates at which teachers include English idioms in their instruction were determined through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection, and the analysis of the data was conducted through qualitative content analysis. The questions used in the semi-structured interviews are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Ages, genders, professional experiences, and schools of the teachers

Teacher ID	Age	Gender	Years of Experience	The schools they are based at
Teacher 1	38	F	15	Türkiye Yardım Sevenler Derneği Ortaokulu
Teacher 2	38	F	15	TOBB Ortaokulu
Teacher 3	40	M	12	Askeriye Ortaokulu
Teacher 4	37	F	12	Suna Uzal Ortaokulu
Teacher 5	44	F	20	Şeker Ortaokulu
Teacher 6	38	F	14	Bucak Bilim ve Sanat Merkezi
Teacher 7	39	F	18	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Anadolu İmam Hatip Lisesi/Ortaokulu
Teacher 8	39	F	12	Gökçebağ Ortaokulu
Teacher 9	38	F	14	İstiklal Ortaokulu
Teacher 10	41	F	18	Mehmetçik Ortaokulu

Note: In the "Teacher" column, (F) stands for Female and (M) stands for Male.

The questions included in the interview are presented in the table below:

Table 2. Interview questions

<i>Do You Include Idioms in English Language Teaching?</i>	
<i>A) Yes, I do.</i>	<i>B) No, I don't.</i>
A.1. How do you think English idioms contribute to students' language skills?	B.1. Why don't you include teaching English idioms?
A.2. What do you think about the impact of English idioms on students' vocabulary development?	B.2. Do you think including idioms in your lessons can help your students increase their vocabulary?
A.3. Which resources do you prefer to use to teach English idioms?	B.3. Do you think including idioms in your lessons can help your students better understand situations they may encounter in real life?

A.4. What methods do you use to increase students' motivation in teaching English idioms?	B.4. Don't you think your students would like to learn more idioms in your lessons?
A.5. What strategies do you use to increase students' language learning motivation in teaching English idioms?	B.5. Do you think including idioms in your lessons can increase students' cultural awareness?
A.6. You are interested in teaching English idioms. Which materials do you use?	B.6. Do you think that including idioms in your lessons will help students communicate better in the target language?
A.7. What strategies do you use to improve students' comprehension skills in teaching English idioms?	B.7. Do you think including idioms in your lessons can help students' learning process?
A.8. What methods do you use to ensure active participation of students in teaching English idioms?	B.8. Do you think teaching grammar is more important than teaching idioms?
A.9. Which learning styles appropriate methods do you use in teaching English idioms?	B.9. Do you think including idioms in your lessons can help students learn the target language more deeply?
A.10. How do you adapt to students' different language levels when teaching English idioms?	B.10. Do you think incorporating idioms in your lessons can help students learn the emotional aspect of the language?
A.11. How do you value student feedback during English idiom instruction?	
A.12. Do you collaborate with colleagues on teaching English idioms? If so, what kind of collaboration do you engage in?	
A.13. What resources do you use to improve yourself in teaching English idioms?	
A.14. Do you follow the practices of different teachers in teaching English idioms? If so, what do you learn?	
A.15. What strategies do you use to increase students' cultural awareness when teaching English idioms?	
A.16. What assessment tools do you use to measure students' ability to use English idioms?	
A.17. What methods do you use to increase students' confidence in teaching English idioms?	
A.18. How do you identify areas where students may have difficulties in learning English idioms?	
A.19. What technological tools do you use to support students' learning process in teaching English idioms?	
A.20. What strategies do you use to diversify students' learning process in teaching English idioms?	

4. Teacher practices in teaching idioms

The analysis of the data showed that the majority (f=8) of the 10 teachers involved in the study did not include idioms in their English lessons. Only two teachers stated that they incorporated idiom teaching in their classroom practices.

4.1. Reasons for not teaching idioms

As a result of the content analysis of the interviews, the following findings were obtained regarding teachers who do not include idiom usage and teaching in their instruction.

Table 3. Opinions of teachers not teaching idioms in their courses

Teacher	Reason for not including idioms in the curriculum	B.1	B.2	B.3	B.4	B.5	B.6	B.7	B.8	B.9	B.10
Teacher 1 (F)	There is no place for it in the curriculum	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 2 (F)	The students do not have sufficient Turkish language skills for learning idioms	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 3 (M)	The students' level of Turkish is insufficient	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 4 (F)	There is no place for it in the curriculum	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 5 (M)	Insufficient language levels and lack of student proficiency prevent the teaching of idioms	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 6 (F)	I do not know	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 7 (M)	There is no place for it in the curriculum	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 8 (M)	There is no place for it in the curriculum	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 9 (F)	There is no place for it in the curriculum	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher 10 (F)	There is no place for it in the curriculum	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

4.2. Curriculum-Based Reasons

Several teachers not including idioms in their classes (T1, T2, T4, T8, T9, T10) stated that they do not teach idioms because they do not find any in the curriculum or only encounter a very small number of idioms. Some teachers mentioned that instead of teaching information that is not included in the curriculum, they try to incorporate simple idioms into conversations.

Teacher 4: I don't make an effort to specifically teach idioms because they are not in the curriculum. I just mention simple idioms to students as they come to mind during conversations.

Additionally, one teacher stated that even if idioms were included in the curriculum, teaching English idioms would not be possible because the students do not know idioms in their own native language.

Teacher 2: While we are still just learning our own Turkish idioms and trying to form abstract concepts in our minds, it is almost impossible to make English idioms that are not part of the curriculum come to life in students' minds.

4.3. Reasons Related to Students' Level of English

Some teachers (T3, T7) believe that their students' levels are not sufficient for learning idioms. According to them, while students are struggling to understand basic concepts, it is impossible to teach idioms, which are abstract concepts far beyond their level. One teacher expressed the following about this reasoning:

Teacher 7: I think idioms, which remain abstract and are difficult to understand even in the high school curriculum, are not suitable for 8th-grade students.

4.4. Reasons Related to Exam Preparation

Some teachers (T8, T10) argue that teaching idioms would not benefit 8th-grade students as they are preparing for the high school entrance exam, and idioms are not included in the exam. According to them, students should focus on understanding exam topics and becoming familiar with the multiple-choice exam format instead of learning idioms. One teacher expressed the following about this reasoning:

Teacher 8: Since 8th-grade students are preparing for the exam and the exam curriculum is very intense, there is no time left for teaching idioms.

4.5. Reasons Related to Time Constraints

One teacher (T9) mentioned that due to the limited time allocated for English classes in the schedule, it is not possible to teach idioms. The intensity of the goals that need to be achieved within this limited time restricts the teaching of idioms. One teacher stated the following regarding this reasoning:

Teacher 9: Since the class time allocated to 8th-grade students is limited, and during this time, grammar teaching, solving practice tests, and exam preparation processes are included, there is no time left for teaching idioms.

4.6. Reasons for teaching idioms

The analysis of the data shows that only a small number (f=2) of the teachers included in the study incorporate idioms in their English lessons. The reasons provided by these two teachers have been categorized into the following arguments.

Table 4. Practices and opinions of teachers teaching idioms in their lessons

	A.1	A.2	A.3	A.4	A.5
Teacher 5 (F)	Idioms enhance students' language skills and make the learning process enjoyable. effectively.	Since students find translating the literal meanings of idioms into Turkish amusing, they learn the words that make up the idiom more	Dictionary Supplementary Materials	Smart Board Educational Games Painting Drama and Role Play Coding Computer Games Television Programs/competitions Rebus puzzles	Learning by doing Imitation Summarizing
	A.6 Technological materials Web 2.0 tools Tests	A.7 Fill-in-the-blanks Matching	A.8 Instructional games at school yards Video Recording	A.9 Kinetic Learning Learning by seeing	A.10 By having more successful students guide others, enabling peer learning.
	A.11 By providing direct positive feedback	A.12 No	A.13 Dictionary Extracurricular Readings Videos	A.14 Yes. I am learning how to teach idioms through film clips.	A.15 I don't use idioms.
	A.16 Matching Drama and Role play	A.17 I first guide students to individual activities, then to group activities. I pair students with low confidence with those who have high confidence.	A.18 I identify them spontaneously during the lesson as they come up	A.19 Smart Board Web 2.0 Tools	A.20 I create an environment where students have a high level of interaction with each other. I monitor students' progress through EBA and provide feedback accordingly.
	A.1	A.2	A.3	A.4	A.5

Teacher 6 (F)	Since the meanings of English idioms attract students' interest, this interest positively affects their language skills	Idioms are more beneficial to students' vocabulary in terms of their literal meanings rather than their figurative meanings	Supplementary Resources	Reading Aloud Listening to Texts	Relating to Real Life Going from the Known to the Unknown
A.6	A.7	A.8	A.9	A.10	
Supplementary Resources	Active Use in Sentences Providing the Turkish Equivalent	Note-taking	Learning by hearing	Reducing the Pace of Lesson Delivery	
A.11	A.12	A.13	A.14	A.15	
By providing direct positive feedback.	No, I don't do it.	Social media Extracurricular readings	No.	No, I don't use them.	
By giving extra points on exams					
A.16	A.17	A.18	A.19	A.20	
I give + for correct answers and – for incorrect answers.	I tell students to take notes on important points and give more speaking opportunities to students with lower confidence	I identify idioms whose Turkish and English versions differ from each other	Word wall Listening Texts on the Smartboard	I present idioms to students by combining them with jokes	

The teachers who emphasized the importance of using and teaching idioms in their lessons provided the following reasons:

- Contributions to language skills
- Making the language learning process fun
- Capturing students' interest

The teachers made the following statements regarding these reasons.

Teacher 5: Since students already use such expressions in their native language, translating idioms literally reveals humorous meanings, which then lead them to the actual meanings. This brings the students joy and helps them retain idioms more easily.

Teacher 6: Focusing on the meanings of idioms both captures students' interest and contributes to the development of their language skills.

The teachers evaluated the impact of idioms on the development of students' vocabulary and provided the following reasons:

- Translation of idioms' literal meanings into Turkish
- Idioms' contribution to vocabulary made up of literal meanings

The teachers expressed the following regarding these reasons:

Teacher 5: Translating the literal meanings of idioms that students encounter outside of class into Turkish increases their vocabulary and improves their ability to use their vocabulary.

Teacher 6: The literal meanings of the words that make up idioms, independent of their figurative meanings, stick in students' minds more, and their vocabulary develops in this direction.

The teachers evaluating the resources they use in classes for teaching idioms provided the following sources:

- Dictionary
- Supplementary Materials

The teachers shared the following views on these resources:

Teacher 5: I ask students to look up the meanings of idioms we encounter in class in their dictionaries. This way, they understand the meanings and usage of idioms better.

Teacher 6: Since textbooks are insufficient in terms of idioms, we use supplementary materials outside of the textbook. The idioms and idiom exercises in these supplementary materials make learning easier.

The teachers who evaluated the methods and tools they use to increase students' motivation in teaching idioms referred to the following ones:

- Smart Board
- Educational Games
- Drawing

- Drama and Role-Playing
- Coding
- Computer Games
- TV Shows/Competitions
- Reading Aloud
- Listening to Texts

The teachers shared the following views on these methods:

Teacher 5: To increase students' motivation, I sometimes ask students to prepare educational games using the smart board, and other times I prepare the games myself. Occasionally, towards the end of the lesson, I ask students to create drawings or use idioms through drama and role-playing, or they participate in TV show-style competitions. Presenting idioms through 'rebus puzzles' also serves as a motivating activity for students. Especially during the pandemic, I used coding activities to teach idioms to students. Additionally, during the pandemic, students worked on incorporating idioms into sandbox games (games where players shape the game world based on their imagination within the mechanics of the game) via Zoom.

Teacher 6: Students really enjoy reading aloud, and it boosts their motivation. Also, listening to texts read by native English speakers increases my students' motivation.

The teachers who evaluated the strategies they use to increase students' motivation in language learning when teaching idioms mentioned the following strategies:

- Learning by doing
- Imitation
- Summarization
- Relating to real life
- Moving from the known to the unknown

The teachers then shared the following views on these strategies:

Teacher 5: I want students to learn idioms by using them in sentences, even if it's just with a single word. I also encourage students to imitate others or people they hear using idioms outside of class. Especially in situations where students feel shy or hesitant to

speak in class, I send them videos containing idioms and ask for a voice recording summarizing the video.

Teacher 6: I never present idioms on their own outside of sentences. I always present them in context and relate them to real-life situations. During this process, I start with words and idioms that students already know and move towards words and idioms they are unfamiliar with.

Two teachers who evaluated the materials they use in teaching idioms provided the following materials:

- Supplementary Materials
- Technological Materials
- Web 2.0 Tools
- Tests

The teachers shared the following views on these materials:

Teacher 5: Since I turned to computer-based activities and Web 2.0 tools during the pandemic and found them to be effective, I continue to prioritize the use of such technological materials after the pandemic as well. Although I don't believe teaching English through tests is ideal, I present idioms to students through tests with multiple-choice questions to help them prepare for exams and get used to the exam format.

Teacher 6: It is especially convenient to use the idioms or the sections where idioms' meanings are given in the tests found in supplementary materials as teaching tools.

The teachers who evaluated the strategies they use to improve students' comprehension skills in teaching idioms provided the following strategies:

- Fill in the Blanks
- Matching
- Active Use in Sentences
- Providing Turkish Equivalents

The teachers shared the following views on these strategies:

Teacher 5: Traditional methods like fill-in-the-blanks and matching idioms with their meanings, especially in the context of tests, improve students' ability to understand idioms.

Teacher 6: Having students actively use idioms in sentences and providing their Turkish equivalents help students learn idioms more effectively.

Two teachers evaluating the methods they use to ensure students' active participation in teaching idioms have presented the following methods:

- Teaching games in the schoolyard
- Video recording
- Note taking

The teachers described the methods as follows:

Teacher 5: Since the number of English classes is high, to maintain active participation during times when engagement drops, I go to the schoolyard and incorporate idioms into games like hopscotch to conduct educational games. Because it is not possible to conduct educational games in the schoolyard every week, I ask students to actively use idioms in video recordings at other times.

Teacher 6: By using the classic method of notetaking, even when students do not actively participate, they have sections they can refer to later, which can help ensure their active participation when the same idiom comes up in subsequent lessons.

Two teachers evaluating which learning styles their methods are suitable for in teaching idioms have presented the following learning styles:

- Kinetic learning
- Visual learning
- Auditory learning

The teachers described the learning styles as follows:

Teacher 5: By using the Total Physical Response method, I ensure students' kinetic learning. It is very important for students to use body language, especially in drama and

role-play. At the same time, by supporting idiom teaching with visuals and using visual materials through the smart board, students also engage in visual learning.

Teacher 6: I believe that the listening texts included in the supplementary resources I use address auditory learning more effectively for students.

Two teachers evaluating how they adapt to students' different language levels in teaching idioms have described the following methods:

- Peer learning
- Reducing the pace of instruction

The teachers described the methods as follows:

Teacher 5: I target students who are ahead with those who are one level below them. Since not every student is equally successful, especially for those at lower levels who do not know basic concepts, it is a logical solution for these students to be guided by “locomotive” students who are ahead through peer learning.

Teacher 6: In classrooms, an average of 5 or 6 students progress at a constant pace, but the same cannot be said for other students. Therefore, I reduce the pace of the lesson, and the intensity of the information conveyed in the lesson to help other students catch up.

Two teachers evaluating the methods they use to provide feedback to students during idiom instruction identified the following types of feedback:

- Direct positive feedback
- Adding extra points to exams

The teachers described the feedback types as follows:

Teacher 5: I provide direct positive feedback to students using examples like, “Well done”, I liked how you used it this way. I had not used it myself for a long time. Your friend made a great sentence. A sentence of the quality you would use in your native language.

Teacher 6: By using phrases like “Congratulations, you remembered correctly,” I motivate students and then add extra points to their exams after noting their names in my notebook.

Both teachers reported not engaging in any collaboration with their colleagues regarding idiom instruction.

The teachers elaborating on the resources they have used to develop themselves in idiom instruction referred to the following resources:

- Dictionaries
- Extracurricular reading activities
- Videos
- Social Media

The teachers described how they benefited from these resources as follows:

Teacher 5: I am more of a teacher who progresses through dictionary reading and my own extracurricular reading. I can learn by noting down what I read and reviewing my notes later. Although rarely, listening to English videos that come my way also enhances my personal development.

Teacher 6: Following the educational posts of teachers I follow on social media helps me improve myself.

A teacher who follows the practices of other teachers regarding idiom instruction noted the following learning points:

- How to implement idiom teaching

The teacher described the learning points as follows:

Teacher 5: Thanks to the notes I took from the shares of the teacher I follow about idioms in film clips, I gain new insights into how idiom instruction can be conducted.

Neither teacher uses any strategies to increase students' cultural awareness in idiom instruction.

Two teachers evaluating the tools they use to measure students' ability to use English idioms identified the following tools:

- Matching
- Drama and role play
- Giving + for correct answers and – for incorrect answers

The teachers described the tools as follows:

Teacher 5: I have students play a matching game on the board, where they match the English idioms with their Turkish counterparts. Occasionally, I ask students to create a dialogue containing idioms and then have them act out this dialogue in class. Since I do not want students to rely on grades, I do not assign any scores based on this assessment.

Teacher 6: I give + if students know the words forming the idioms and their meanings, and – if they do not, and I record this in my notebook. However, I do not transfer these pluses and minuses to any grading system.

Two teachers evaluating the methods they use to increase students' self-confidence in idiom instruction identified the following methods:

- Moving from individual to group activities
- Pairing low self-confidence students with high self-confidence students
- Giving more speaking opportunities to low self-confidence students
- Telling students to take notes on important parts

The teachers described the methods as follows:

Teacher 5: When I say we will start with a group activity to students with low self-confidence, it becomes an overwhelming burden for them. Therefore, I first have these students do individual activities, which I check myself, and then I include them in group activities. Within group activities, I pair low self-confidence students with high self-confidence students to help them become more familiar with group activities. This way, both students in the pair feel more comfortable and secure.

Teacher 6: I tell low self-confidence students to take notes on important parts directly without pressuring or threatening them. This way, these students are aware that they are not ignored or invisible during the lesson. Additionally, I give them priority when they request to speak during the lesson to prevent their motivation from decreasing.

For supporting students' learning process in idiom instruction, the two teachers identified the following technological resources:

- Smart board and listening texts on the Smart Board
- Web 2.0 tools

➤ Word wall

The teachers described the technological resources as follows:

Teacher 5: I use the smart board for teaching idioms in most of my lessons. Access to many resources through the smart board makes idiom instruction easier. Additionally, the Web 2.0 tools that I have recently started using are very important for providing variety in idiom instruction.

Teacher 6: Listening texts read by native English speakers, myself, or students on the smart board make it easier for students to pronounce idioms. The Word Wall application, which I use frequently, can be adjusted according to students' levels and makes idiom learning more enjoyable.

To diversify the learning process in idiom instruction, the two teachers identified the following strategies:

- Always creating interactive learning environment
- Monitoring and feedback on the learning process via EBA
- Presentation of idioms with jokes

The teachers described the strategies as follows:

Teacher 5: Viewing students' progress through EBA outside of class and providing feedback based on their progress, along with involving parents in the process, makes the learning process more varied. In class, creating an environment where students are constantly interacting with each other or with the teacher makes the process more efficient.

Teacher 6: Combining idioms with jokes and presenting them as questions creates fun moments when students provide answers, offering a different variety compared to traditional presentation methods.

In summary, the use of idioms in EFL classes reveals a notable disparity in instructional practices among teachers. The data indicates that while most teachers (8 out of 10) do not incorporate idioms into their lessons, primarily due to curriculum constraints, perceived lack of student readiness, and time limitations, a minority (2 out of 10) actively integrate idiom teaching into their practices. The latter group highlights the benefits of idioms in enhancing language

skills, making learning engaging, and broadening vocabulary through literal and figurative meanings. They employ a variety of resources and methods, such as supplementary materials, educational games, and technology, to facilitate idiom instruction. Conversely, the reluctance to teach idioms among the larger group of teachers is rooted in curriculum rigidity, concerns over students' language proficiency, and preparation for standardized exams. This divergence underscores the need for a more flexible curriculum that accommodates idiom instruction and for professional development opportunities that emphasize the value of idioms in language learning. Addressing these gaps could enhance the overall effectiveness of EFL instruction and better support students in achieving a more nuanced understanding of the language.

5. Conclusion

This study emerged from the need to investigate the extent to which idioms are incorporated into middle school English lessons in Turkey. The response to the first research question reveals through interviews with teachers that more than half ($f=8$) of the teachers do not include the use of English idioms in their 8th-grade English classes. Among those who do not incorporate idioms into their English lessons, a common belief is that English idioms are not included in the curriculum; thus, they do not address idioms in their classes. The lack of idioms in the curriculum, combined with students' insufficient level for learning idioms, the focus on exam preparation for 8th graders, and the prioritization of other curriculum topics, collectively prevent idiom teaching from being a focal point or even occasionally addressed in middle school English lessons.

The main factor influencing teachers who wish to include idioms in their lessons but are unable to achieve this goal is the rigidity of the curriculum and the school's approach to it. Despite teachers' desires to incorporate idioms into their lessons, the curriculum's inflexibility and its linear progression, which does not allow for external intervention or interpretation, shape their perspectives on idiom instruction. Additionally, teachers' negative attitudes towards idiom teaching are often rooted in the belief that grammar instruction is more important than teaching idiomatic and communicative language use. In reality, an analysis of teachers' comments about English idioms suggests that their approaches to lesson delivery are neither strictly rigid nor flexible. Consequently, points of instruction like idioms, perceived as "foreign" elements, are seen as disrupting the cohesion of the lesson.

Nevertheless, teachers who believe they have overcome the obstacles to teaching idioms ($f=2$) express more positive attitudes toward idioms, noting their importance in both literal and

figurative communication within a language class. They also indicated that, with sufficient resources and creativity, teaching idioms could enhance language skills and be more successful compared to the often perceived as simple and monotonous grammar instruction in 8th-grade secondary school English classes.

Certainly, the differences of opinion regarding the teaching of idioms in English classes reveal several implications for school administration and curriculum design. First, based on the research results, it is evident that those responsible for designing the curriculum and the school administration implementing it have not included English idioms in any way. Incorporating idioms into the curriculum could be a step toward making language teaching in schools more communicative. Second, adding questions that involve idioms and require idiom knowledge for successful responses to official exams could encourage both teachers to teach idioms and students to learn them. Third, integrating idiom teaching as part of language skills instruction within the English curriculum would make idiom instruction more accessible in terms of time and workload.

However, this research has some limitations that should be noted. Firstly, the limitation of the sample group to the Burdur province means that the findings are not broadly representative of the entire country. Nonetheless, this does not imply that the results are irrelevant or unrelated to other research contexts. In qualitative research, an in-depth exploration of the topic and its guidance for future studies is often more significant than generalizing. The rich descriptions and findings presented throughout the research could serve as a guide for addressing similar issues in teaching and learning contexts. Secondly, the study's limitation to teachers excluded student perspectives from the evaluation. Thirdly, since the findings were derived from interviews with teachers, they reflect the teachers' own evaluations and interpretations of their behaviors. Using different methods, such as classroom observations, might have yielded different results. Considering all the limitations, it is evident that there are many aspects to be addressed and investigated in future research. Future studies should include not only teachers' opinions but also students' perspectives, potentially through classroom observations or video recordings of lessons if feasible. Additionally, exploring various approaches and methods for teaching idioms could provide a rich area for future research.

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